

Dialectic

Dialectic or **dialectics** (Greek: διαλεκτική, *dialektikḗ*), also known as the **dialectical method**, is a discourse between two or more people holding different points of view about a subject but wishing to establish the truth through reasoned arguments.

In philosophy, dialectic or dialectical method implied a methodology used for examining and cognition of philosophical objects. Dialectical methods demands the users to examine the objects in relation to other objects and to the whole system, and examine the objects within a dynamic, evolutionary environment. Dialectical method is usually contrasted with metaphysical method, which examine the objects in a separated, isolated and static environment.

Dialectical method has three main forms corresponding to three developmental stages. Naive dialectic, emerging in ancient history, mainly relied on intuition and personal experience with limited supporting scientific evidences. Idealistic dialectic, a product of classic German idealism and reaching its zenith in the works of Hegel, was the first systematic form of dialectical method. Materialistic dialectics, built mainly by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Lenin, adapted the Hegelian dialectic into traditional materialism.

The term *dialectic* is not synonymous with the term *debate*. While in theory debaters are not necessarily emotionally invested in their point of view, in practice debaters frequently display an emotional commitment that may cloud rational judgment. Debates are won through a combination of persuading the opponent, proving one's argument correct, and proving the opponent's argument incorrect. Debates do not necessarily require promptly identifying a clear winner or loser; however, clear winners are frequently determined by a judge, a jury or group consensus. The term *dialectics* is also not synonymous with the term *rhetoric*, a method or art of discourse that seeks to persuade, inform, or motivate an audience.^[1] Concepts like "logos" or rational appeal, "pathos" or emotional appeal, and "ethos" or ethical appeal, are intentionally used by rhetoricians to persuade an audience.^[2]

Socrates favoured truth as the highest value, proposing that it could be discovered through reason and logic in discussion: ergo, *dialectic*. Socrates valued rationality (appealing to logic, not emotion) as the proper means for persuasion, the discovery of truth, and the determinant for one's actions. To Socrates, *truth*, not *aretē* (moral virtue), was the greater good, and each person should, above all else, seek truth to guide one's life. Therefore, Socrates opposed the Sophists and their teaching of rhetoric as art and as emotional oratory requiring neither logic nor proof.^[3] Different forms of dialectical reasoning have emerged throughout history from the Indosphere (Greater India) and the West (Europe). These forms include the Socratic method, Hindu, Buddhist, Medieval, Hegelian, Marxist, Talmudic, and Neo-orthodoxy dialectics.

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Principles

The purpose of the dialectic method of reasoning is resolution of disagreement through rational discussion, and, ultimately, the search for truth.^{[4][5]} One way to proceed—the Socratic method—is to show that a given hypothesis (with other admissions) leads to a contradiction; thus, forcing the withdrawal of the hypothesis as a candidate for truth (see reductio ad absurdum). Another dialectical resolution of disagreement is by denying a presupposition of the contending thesis and antithesis; thereby, proceeding to sublation (transcendence) to synthesis, a third thesis.

Fichtean^[6]/Hegelian dialectics is based upon four concepts:

1. Everything is transient and finite, existing in the medium of time.
2. Everything is composed of contradictions (opposing forces).
3. Gradual changes lead to crises, turning points when one force overcomes its opponent force (quantitative change leads to qualitative change).
4. Change is helical (periodic without returning to the same position), not circular (negation of the negation^[7]).

The concept of *dialectic* (as a unity of opposites) existed in the philosophy of Heraclitus of Ephesus, who proposed that everything is in constant change, as a result of inner strife and opposition.^{[8][9][10]} Hence, the history of the dialectical method is the history of philosophy.^[11]

Western dialectical forms

Classical philosophy

In classical philosophy, dialectic (διαλεκτική) is a form of reasoning based upon dialogue of arguments and counter-arguments, advocating propositions (theses) and counter-propositions (antitheses). The outcome of such a dialectic might be the refutation of a relevant proposition, or of a synthesis, or a combination of the opposing assertions, or a qualitative improvement of the dialogue.^{[12][13]}

Moreover, the term "dialectic" owes much of its prestige to its role in the philosophies of Socrates and Plato, in the Greek Classical period (5th to 4th centuries BCE). Aristotle said that it was the pre-Socratic philosopher Zeno of Elea who invented dialectic, of which the dialogues of Plato are the examples of the Socratic dialectical method.^[14]

According to Kant, however, the ancient Greeks used the word "dialectic" to signify the logic of false appearance or semblance. To the Ancients, "it was nothing but the logic of illusion. It was a sophistic art of giving to one's ignorance, indeed even to one's intentional tricks, the outward appearance of truth, by imitating the thorough, accurate method which logic always requires, and by using its topic as a cloak for every empty assertion."^[15]

Socratic dialogue

In Plato's dialogues and other Socratic dialogues, Socrates attempts to examine someone's beliefs, at times even first principles or premises by which we all reason and argue. Socrates typically argues by cross-examining his interlocutor's claims and premises in order to draw out a contradiction or inconsistency among them. According to Plato, the rational detection of error amounts to finding the proof of the antithesis.^[16] However, important as this objective is, the principal aim of Socratic activity seems to be to improve the soul of his interlocutors, by freeing them from unrecognized errors.

For example, in the *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks Euthyphro to provide a definition of piety. Euthyphro replies that the pious is that which is loved by the gods. But, Socrates also has Euthyphro agreeing that the gods are quarrelsome and their quarrels, like human quarrels, concern objects of love or hatred. Therefore, Socrates reasons, at least one thing exists that certain gods love but other gods hate. Again, Euthyphro agrees. Socrates concludes that if Euthyphro's definition of piety is acceptable, then there must exist at least one thing that is both pious and impious (as it is both loved and hated by the gods)—which Euthyphro admits is absurd. Thus, Euthyphro is brought to a realization by this dialectical method that his definition of piety is not sufficiently meaningful.

Dialectic can be defined as a, "mode of thought, or a philosophic medium, through which contradiction becomes a starting point (rather than a dead end) for contemplation"^[17] Socrates proposed this form of dialectic through a Socratic method termed elenchus. To achieve the ultimate truth of opinions, hence dialectic, Socrates refuted propositions by proving his own statements true. In common cases, Socrates used enthymemes as the foundation of his argument. Discourse was applied to guide his reasoned arguments until the interlocutors had no other choice but to agree with him, conclusively contradicting their original theses. Therefore, Socrates, in result, would have reached ultimate truth.

For example, in Plato's *Gorgias*, dialectic occurs between Socrates, the Sophist Gorgias, and two men, Polus and Callicles. Because Socrates' ultimate goal was to reach true knowledge, he was even willing to change his own views in order to arrive at the truth. The fundamental goal of dialectic, in this instance, was to establish a precise definition of the subject (in this case, rhetoric) and with the use of argumentation and questioning, make the subject even more precise. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates reaches the truth by asking a series of questions and in return, receiving short, clear answers.

Socrates asks Gorgias if he who has learned carpentering is a carpenter, and if he who has learned music is a musician, and if he who has learned medicine is a physician, and so forth. Gorgias one way or another replies "yes," to all of these questions. Socrates then continues by asking Gorgias if he believes that a just man will always desire to do what is just and never intend to do injustice. Yet again, Gorgias replies, "yes." Socrates then brings up the fact that earlier in their conversation Gorgias stated that rhetoricians are just men. Gorgias agrees. In return, Socrates contradicts Gorgias' statements, because Gorgias had implied that if a rhetorician uses rhetoric for injustices, the teacher should not be at fault. If this were to occur, then a rhetorician would in fact not be a just man. Socrates discovered the inconsistency in Gorgias' statements and ends the excerpt by stating "there will be a great deal of discussion, before we get at the truth of all this."

This example demonstrates how dialectic is used as a method to maneuver people into contradicting their own theses. Reasoned argumentative discourse furthers the establishment of the truth. Dialectic, dissimilar to debates, naturally comes to an end. The ultimate truth will be arrived at and contradiction diminished.

There is another interpretation of the dialectic, as a method of intuition suggested in *The Republic*.^[18] Simon Blackburn writes that the dialectic in this sense is used to understand "the total process of enlightenment, whereby the philosopher is educated so as to achieve knowledge of the supreme good, the Form of the Good"^[19]

Aristotle

Aristotle stresses that rhetoric is closely related to dialectic. He offers several formulas to describe this affinity between the two disciplines: first of all, rhetoric is said to be a "counterpart" (*antistrophos*) to dialectic (*Rhet. I.1, 1354a1*); (ii) it is also called an "outgrowth" (*paraphues ti*) of dialectic and the study of character (*Rhet. I.2, 1356a25f.*); finally, Aristotle says that rhetoric is part of dialectic and resembles it (*Rhet. I.2, 1356a30f.*). In saying that rhetoric is a counterpart to dialectic, Aristotle obviously alludes to Plato's *Gorgias* (464bff.), where rhetoric is ironically defined as a counterpart to cookery in the soul. Since, in this passage, Plato uses the word 'antistrophos' to designate an analogy, it is likely that Aristotle wants to express a kind of analogy too: what dialectic is for the (private or academic) practice of attacking and maintaining an argument, rhetoric is for the (public) practice of defending oneself

or accusing an opponent. The analogy to dialectic has important implications for the status of rhetoric. Plato argued in his *Gorgias* that rhetoric cannot be an art (*technê*), since it is not related to a definite subject, while real arts are defined by their specific subjects, as e.g. medicine or shoemaking are defined by their products, i.e., health and shoes.^[20]

Medieval philosophy

Dialectics (also called logic) was one of the three liberal arts taught in medieval universities as part of the trivium. The trivium also included rhetoric and grammar.^{[21][22][23][24]}

Based mainly on Aristotle, the first medieval philosopher to work on dialectics was Boethius.^[25] After him, many scholastic philosophers also made use of dialectics in their works, such as Abelard,^[26] William of Sherwood,^[27] Garlandus Compotista,^[28] Walter Burley, Roger Swyneshed, William of Ockham,^[29] and Thomas Aquinas.^[30]

This dialectic was formed as follows:

1. The Question to be determined
2. The principal objections to the question
3. An argument in favor of the Question, traditionally a single argument ("On the contrary")
4. The determination of the Question after weighing the evidence. ("I answer that...")
5. The replies to each objection

Modern philosophy

The concept of dialectics was given new life by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (following Johann Gottlieb Fichte), whose dialectically synthetic model of nature and of history made it, as it were, a fundamental aspect of the nature of reality (instead of regarding the contradictions into which dialectics leads as a sign of the sterility of the dialectical method, Immanuel Kant tended to do in his *Critique of Pure Reason*).^{[31][32]} In the mid-19th century, the concept of "dialectic" was appropriated by Karl Marx (see, for example, *Das Kapital*, published in 1867) and Friedrich Engels and retooled in a dynamic, nonidealistic manner. It would also become a crucial part of later representations of Marxism as a philosophy of dialectical materialism. These representations often contrasted dramatically^[33] and led to vigorous debate among different Marxist groupings, leading some prominent Marxists to give up on the idea of dialectics completely.^[34] Thus this concept has played a prominent role on the world stage and in world history. In contemporary polemics, "dialectics" may also refer to an understanding of how we can or should perceive the world (epistemology); an assertion that the nature of the world outside one's perception is interconnected, contradictory, and dynamic (ontology); or it can refer to a method of presentation of ideas and conclusions (discourse). According to Hegel, "dialectic" is the method by which human history unfolds; that is to say history progresses as a dialectical process.

Hegelian dialectic

Hegelian dialectic, usually presented in a threefold manner, was stated by Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus.^[35] as comprising three dialectical stages of development: a thesis; giving rise to its reaction, an antithesis, which contradicts or negates the thesis; and the tension between the two being resolved by means of a synthesis. In more simplistic terms, one can consider it thus; problem → reaction → solution. Although this model is often named after Hegel, he himself never used that specific formulation. Hegel ascribed that terminology to Kant.^[36] Carrying on Kant's work, Fichte greatly elaborated on the synthesis model, and popularized it.

On the other hand, Hegel did use a three-valued logical model that is very similar to the antithesis model, but Hegel's most usual terms were: Abstract-Negative-Concrete. Hegel used this writing model as a backbone to accompany his points in many of his works.

The formula, thesis-antithesis-synthesis, does not explain why the thesis requires an antithesis. However, the formula, abstract-negative-concrete, suggests a flaw, or perhaps an incompleteness, in any initial thesis—it is too abstract and lacks the negative of trial, error, and experience. For Hegel, the concrete, the synthesis, the absolute, must always pass through the phase of the negative, in the journey to completion, that is, mediation. This is the essence of what is popularly called Hegelian Dialectics.

According to the German philosopher Walter Kaufmann

"Fichte introduced into German philosophy the three-step of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, using these three terms. Schelling took up this terminology. *Hegel did not*. He never once used these three terms together to designate three stages in an argument or account in any of his books. And they do not help us understand his *Phenomenology*, his *Logic*, or his philosophy of history; they impede any open-minded comprehension of what he does by forcing it into a scheme which was available to him and which he deliberately spurned [...] The mechanical formalism [...] Hegel derides expressly and at some length in the preface to the *Phenomenology*.^{[37][38]}

Kaufmann also cites Hegel's criticism of the triad model commonly misattributed to him, adding that "the only place where Hegel uses the three terms together occurs in his lectures on the history of philosophy, on the last page but one of the section on Kant—where Hegel roundly reproaches Kant for having 'everywhere posited thesis, antithesis, synthesis'.^[39]

To describe the activity of overcoming the negative, Hegel also often used the term *Aufhebung*, variously translated into English as "sublation" or "overcoming," to conceive of the working of the dialectic. Roughly, the term indicates preserving the useful portion of an idea, thing, society, etc., while moving beyond its limitations. (Jacques Derrida's preferred French translation of the term was *relever*.)^[40]

In the *Logic*, for instance, Hegel describes a dialectic of existence: first, existence must be posited as pure Being (*Sein*); but pure Being, upon examination, is found to be indistinguishable from Nothing (*Nichts*). When it is realized that what is coming into being is, at the same time, also returning to nothing (in life, for example, one's living is also a dying), both Being and Nothing are united as Becoming.^[41]

As in the Socratic dialectic, Hegel claimed to proceed by making implicit contradictions explicit: each stage of the process is the product of contradictions inherent or implicit in the preceding stage. For Hegel, the whole of history is one tremendous dialectic, major stages of which chart a progression from self-alienation as slavery to self-unification and realization as the rational constitutional state of free and equal citizens. The Hegelian dialectic cannot be mechanically applied for any chosen thesis. Critics argue that the selection of any antithesis, other than the logical negation of the thesis, is subjective. Then, if the logical negation is used as the antithesis, there is no rigorous way to derive a synthesis. In practice, when an antithesis is selected to suit the user's subjective purpose, the resulting "contradictions" are rhetorical, not logical, and the resulting synthesis is not rigorously defensible against a multitude of other possible syntheses. The problem with the Fichtean "thesis–antithesis–synthesis" model is that it implies that contradictions or negations come from outside of things. Hegel's point is that they are inherent in and internal to things. This conception of dialectics derives ultimately from Heraclitus.

Hegel stated that the purpose of dialectics is "to study things in their own being and movement and thus to demonstrate the finitude of the partial categories of understanding."^[42]

One important dialectical principle for Hegel is the transition from quantity to quality, which he terms the Measure. The measure is the qualitative quantum, the quantum is the existence of quantity.^[43]

"The identity between quantity and quality, which is found in Measure, is at first only implicit, and not yet explicitly realised. In other words, these two categories, which unite in Measure, each claim an independent authority. On the one hand, the quantitative features of existence may be altered, without affecting its quality. On the other hand, this increase and diminution, immaterial though it be, has its limit, by exceeding which the quality ~~shifts~~ changes. [...] But if the quantity present in measure exceeds a certain limit, the quality corresponding to it is also put in abeyance. This however is not a negation of quality altogether, but only of this definite quality, the place of which is at once occupied by another. This process of measure, which appears alternately as a mere change in quantity, and then as a sudden revulsion of quantity into quality may be envisaged under the figure of a nodal (knotted) line!"^[44]

As an example, Hegel mentions the states of aggregation of water: "Thus the temperature of water is, in the first place, a point of no consequence in respect of its liquidity: still with the increase or diminution of the temperature of the liquid water, there comes a point where this state of cohesion suffers a qualitative change, and the water is converted into steam or ice".^[45] As other examples Hegel

mentions the reaching of a point where a single additional grain makes a heap of wheat; or where the bald tail is produced, if we continue plucking out single hairs.

Another important principle for Hegel is the negation of the negation, which he also terms *Aufhebung* (sublation): Something is only what it is in its relation to another, but by the negation of the negation this something incorporates the other into itself. The dialectical movement involves two moments that negate each other, something and its other. As a result of the negation of the negation, "something becomes its other; this other is itself something; therefore it likewise becomes an other, and so on ad infinitum".^[46] Something in its passage into other only joins with itself, it is self-related.^[47] In becoming there are two moments:^[48] coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be: by sublation, i.e., negation of the negation, being passes over into nothing, it ceases to be, but something new shows up, is coming to be. What is sublated (*aufgehoben*) on the one hand ceases to be and is put to an end, but on the other hand it is preserved and maintained.^[49] In dialectics, a totality transforms itself; it is self-related, then self-forgetful, relieving the original tension.

Marxist dialectic

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels proposed that G.F Hegel had rendered philosophy too abstractly ideal:

The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.^[50]

In contradiction to Hegelian idealism, Karl Marx presented dialectical materialism (Marxist dialectic):

My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e. the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea', he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea'. With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.^[51]

In Marxism, the dialectical method of historical study became intertwined with historical materialism, the school of thought exemplified by the works of Marx, Engels, and Vladimir Lenin. In the USSR, under Joseph Stalin, Marxist dialectics became "diamat" (short for dialectical materialism), a theory emphasizing the primacy of the material way of life; social "praxis" over all forms of social consciousness; and the secondary, dependent character of the "ideal". The term "dialectical materialism" was coined by the 19th-century social theorist Joseph Dietzgen who used the theory to explain the nature of socialism and social development. The original populariser of Marxism in Russia, Georgi Plekhanov used the terms "dialectical materialism" and "historical materialism" interchangeably. For Lenin, the primary feature of Marx's "dialectical materialism" (Lenin's term) was its application of materialist philosophy to history and social sciences. Lenin's main input in the philosophy of dialectical materialism was his theory of reflection, which presented human consciousness as a dynamic reflection of the objective material world that fully shapes its contents and structure. Later, Stalin's works on the subject established a rigid and formalistic division of Marxist–Leninist theory in the dialectical materialism and historical materialism parts. While the first was supposed to be the key method and theory of the philosophy of nature, the second was the Soviet version of the philosophy of history

A dialectical method was fundamental to Marxist politics, e.g., the works of Karl Korsch, Georg Lukács and certain members of the Frankfurt School. Soviet academics, notably Evdal Ilyenkov and Zaid Orudzhev, continued pursuing unorthodox philosophic study of Marxist dialectics; likewise in the West, notably the philosopher Bertell Ollman at New York University.

Friedrich Engels proposed that Nature is dialectical, thus, in Anti-Dühring he said that the negation of negation is:

A very simple process, which is taking place everywhere and every day, which any child can understand as soon as it is stripped of the veil of mystery in which it was enveloped by the old idealist philosophy.^[52]

In *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels said:

Probably the same gentlemen who up to now have decried the transformation of quantity into quality as mysticism and incomprehensible transcendentalism will now declare that it is indeed something quite self-evident, trivial, and commonplace, which they have long employed, and so they have been taught nothing new. But to have formulated for the first time in its universally valid form a general law of development of Nature, society, and thought, will always remain an act of historic importance.^[53]

Marxist dialectics is exemplified in *Das Kapital* (Capital), which outlines two central theories: (i) surplus value and (ii) the materialist conception of history; Marx explains dialectical materialism:

In its rational form, it is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension an affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time, also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.^[54]

Class struggle is the central contradiction to be resolved by Marxist dialectics, because of its central role in the social and political lives of a society. Nonetheless, Marx and Marxists developed the concept of class struggle to comprehend the dialectical contradictions between mental and manual labor, and between town and country. Hence, philosophic contradiction is central to the development of dialectics – the progress from quantity to quality, the acceleration of gradual social change; the negation of the initial development of the *status quo*; the negation of that negation; and the high-level recurrence of features of the original *status quo*. In the USSR, Progress Publishers issued anthologies of dialectical materialism by Lenin, wherein he also quotes Marx and Engels:

As the most comprehensive and profound doctrine of development, and the richest in content, Hegelian dialectics was considered by Marx and Engels the greatest achievement of classical German philosophy... "The great basic thought", Engels writes, "that the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes, in which the things, apparently stable no less than their mind images in our heads, the concepts, go through an uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away... this great fundamental thought has, especially since the time of Hegel, so thoroughly permeated ordinary consciousness that, in its generality, it is now scarcely ever contradicted.

But, to acknowledge this fundamental thought in words, and to apply it in reality in detail to each domain of investigation, are two different things.... For dialectical philosophy nothing is final, absolute, sacred. It reveals the transitory character of everything and in everything; nothing can endure before it, except the uninterrupted process of becoming and of passing away, of endless ascendancy from the lower to the higher. And dialectical philosophy, itself, is nothing more than the mere reflection of this process in the thinking brain." Thus, according to Marx, dialectics is "the science of the general laws of motion both of the external world and of human thought."^[55]

Lenin describes his dialectical understanding of the concept of *development*:

A development that repeats, as it were, stages that have already been passed, but repeats them in a different way, on a higher basis ("the negation of the negation"), a development, so to speak, that proceeds in spirals, not in a straight line; a development by leaps, catastrophes, and revolutions; "breaks in continuity"; the transformation of quantity into quality; inner impulses towards development, imparted by the contradiction and conflict of the various forces and tendencies acting on a given body, or within a given phenomenon, or within a given society; the interdependence and

the closest and indissoluble connection between all aspects of any phenomenon (history constantly revealing ever new aspects), a connection that provides a uniform, and universal process of motion, one that follows definite laws – these are some of the features of dialectics as a doctrine of development that is richer than the conventional one.^[55]

Indian forms

Indian continental debate: an intra- and inter-Dharmic dialectic

Anacker (2005: p. 20), in the introduction to his translation of seven works by the Buddhist monk Vasubandhu (fl. 4th century), a famed dialectician of the Gupta Empire, contextualizes the prestige of dialectic and cut-throat debate in classical India and makes references to the possibly apocryphal story of the banishment of Moheyan post-debate with Kamalaśīla (fl. 713–763):

Philosophical debating was in classical India often a spectator-sport, much as contests of poetry-improvisation were in Germany in its High Middle Ages, and as they still are in the Telugu country today. The king himself was often the judge at these debates, and loss to an opponent could have serious consequences. To take an atrociously extreme example, when the Tamil Śaivite Ñānasambandar Nāyanār defeated the Jain ācāryas in Madurai before the Pāṇḍya King Māravarman Avaniśūlāmani (620-645) this debate is said to have resulted in the impalement of 8000 Jains, an event still celebrated in the Mīnāksi Temple of Madurai today. Usually, the results were not so drastic; they could mean formal recognition by the defeated side of the superiority of the winning party, forced conversions, or, as in the case of the Council of Lhasa which was conducted by Indians, banishment of the losers.^[56]

Brahmana/Vedic/Hindu dialectic

While Western philosophy traces dialectics to ancient Greek thought of Socrates and Plato, the idea of tension between two opposing forces leading to synthesis is much older and present in Hindu Philosophy.^[57] Indian philosophy, for the most part subsumed within the Indian religions, has an ancient tradition of dialectic polemics. The two complements, "purusha" (the active cause) and the "prakṛiti" (the passive nature) brings everything into existence. They follow the "rta", the Dharma (Universal Law of Nature).

Jain dialectic

Anekantavada and Syadvada are the sophisticated dialectic traditions developed by the Jains to arrive at truth. As per Jainism, the truth or the reality is perceived differently from different points of view, and that no single point of view is the complete truth.^{[58][59]} Jain doctrine of Anekantavada states that an object has infinite modes of existence and qualities and, as such, they cannot be completely perceived in all its aspects and manifestations, due to the inherent limitations of being human. Only the Kevalis—the omniscient beings—can comprehend the object in all its aspects and manifestations, and that all others are capable of knowing only a part of it. Consequently, no one view can claim to represent the absolute truth. According to Jains, the ultimate principle should always be logical and no principle can be devoid of logic or reason.^[60] Thus one finds in the Jain texts, deliberative exhortations on any subject in all its facts, may they be constructive or obstructive, inferential or analytical, enlightening or destructive.^[61]

Syādvāda is a theory of conditioned predication that provides an expression to anekānta by recommending that epithet Syād be attached to every expression.^[62] Syādvāda is not only an extension of Anekānta ontology, but a separate system of logic capable of standing on its own force. The Sanskrit etymological root of the term Syād is "perhaps" or "maybe", but in context of syādvāda, it means "in some ways" or "from a perspective." As reality is complex, no single proposition can express the nature of reality fully. Thus the term "syāt" should be prefixed before each proposition giving it a conditional point of view and thus removing any dogmatism in the statement.^[63] Since it ensures that each statement is expressed from seven different conditional and relative view points or propositions, it is known as theory of conditioned predication. These seven propositions also known as saptabhangi are:^[64]

1. **syād-astī**. "in some ways it is"
2. **syād-nāstī**. "in some ways it is not"

3. *syād-asti-nāsti*: "in some ways it is and it is not"
4. *syād-asti-avaktavyaḥ*: "in some ways it is and it is indescribable"
5. *syād-nāsti-avaktavyaḥ*: "in some ways it is not and it is indescribable"
6. *syād-asti-nāsti-avaktavyaḥ*: "in some ways it is, it is not and it is indescribable"
7. *syād-avaktavyaḥ*: "in some ways it is indescribable"

Buddhist dialectic

Buddhism has developed sophisticated, and sometimes highly institutionalized traditions of dialectics during its long history. Nalanda University, and later the Gelugpa Buddhism of Tibet, are examples. The historical development and clarification of Buddhist doctrine and polemics, through dialectics and formal debate, is well documented. Buddhist doctrine was rigorously critiqued (though not ultimately refuted) in the 2nd century by Nagarjuna, whose uncompromisingly logical approach to the realisation of truth, became the basis for the development of a vital stream of Buddhist thought. This dialectical approach of Buddhism, to the elucidation and articulation of an account of the Cosmos as the truth it really is, became known as the Perfection of Wisdom and was later developed by other notable thinkers, such as Dignaga and Dharmakirti (between 500 and 700). The dialectical method of truth-seeking is evident throughout the traditions of Madhyamaka, Yogacara, and Tantric Buddhism. Trisong Detsen, and later Je Tsongkhapa, championed the value of dialectic and of formalised training in debate in Tibet.

Dialectical theology

Neo-orthodoxy, in Europe also known as theology of crisis and dialectical theology,^{[65][66]} is an approach to theology in Protestantism that was developed in the aftermath of the First World War (1914–1918). It is characterized as a reaction against doctrines of 19th-century liberal theology and a more positive reevaluation of the teachings of the Reformation, much of which had been in decline (especially in western Europe) since the late 18th century.^[67] It is primarily associated with two Swiss professors and pastors, Karl Barth^[68] (1886–1968) and Emil Brunner (1899–1966),^{[65][66]} even though Barth himself expressed his unease in the use of the term.^[69]

In dialectical theology the difference and opposition between God and human beings is stressed in such a way that all human attempts at overcoming this opposition through moral, religious or philosophical idealism must be characterized as 'sin'. In the death of Christ humanity is negated and overcome, but this judgment also points forwards to the resurrection in which humanity is reestablished in Christ. For Barth this meant that only through God's 'no' to everything human can his 'yes' be perceived. Applied to traditional themes of Protestant theology, such as double predestination, this means that election and reprobation cannot be viewed as a quantitative limitation of God's action. Rather it must be seen as its "qualitative definition".^[70] As Christ bore the rejection as well as the election of God for all humanity every person is subject to both aspects of God's double predestination.

Dialectical method and dualism

Another way to understand dialectics is to view it as a method of thinking to overcome formal dualism and monistic reductionism.^[71] For example, formal dualism regards the opposites as mutually exclusive entities, whilst monism finds each to be an epiphenomenon of the other. Dialectical thinking rejects both views. The dialectical method requires focus on both at the same time. It looks for a transcendence of the opposites entailing a leap of the imagination to a higher level, which (1) provides justification for rejecting both alternatives as false and/or (2) helps elucidate a real but previously veiled integral relationship between apparent opposites that have been kept apart and regarded as distinct. For example, the superposition principle of quantum physics can be explained using the dialectical method of thinking—likewise the example below from dialectical biology. Such examples showing the relationship of the dialectic method of thinking to the scientific method to a large part negates the criticism of Popper (see text below) that the two are mutually exclusive. The dialectic method also examines false alternatives presented by formal dualism (materialism vs idealism; rationalism vs empiricism; mind vs body, etc.) and looks for ways to transcend the opposites and form synthesis. In the dialectical method, both have something in common, and understanding of the parts requires understanding their relationship with the whole system. The dialectical method thus views the whole of reality as an evolving process.

Criticisms

Dialectics has become central to "Continental" philosophy, but it plays no part in "Anglo-American" philosophy. In other words, on the continent of Europe, dialectics has entered intellectual culture as what might be called a legitimate part of thought and philosophy whereas in America and Britain, the dialectic plays no discernible part in the intellectual culture, which instead tends toward positivism. A prime example of the European tradition is Jean-Paul Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, which is very different from the works of Popper, whose philosophy was for a time highly influential in the UK where hesitated (see below). Sartre states:

"Existentialism, like Marxism, addresses itself to experience in order to discover there concrete syntheses. It can conceive of these syntheses only within a moving, dialectical totalisation, which is nothing else but history or—from the strictly cultural point of view adopted here—'philosophy-becoming-the world'."^[72]

Karl Popper has attacked the dialectic repeatedly. In 1937 he wrote and delivered a paper entitled "What Is Dialectic?" in which he attacked the dialectical method for its willingness "to put up with contradictions"^[73] Popper concluded the essay with these words: "The whole development of dialectic should be a warning against the dangers inherent in philosophical system-building. It should remind us that philosophy should not be made a basis for any sort of scientific system and that philosophers should be much more modest in their claims. One task which they can fulfill quite usefully is the study of the critical methods of science" (Ibid., p. 335).

In chapter 12 of volume 2 of *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1944; 5th rev. ed., 1966) Popper unleashed a famous attack on Hegelian dialectics, in which he held that Hegel's thought (unjustly, in the view of some philosophers, such as Walter Kaufmann,^[74]) was to some degree responsible for facilitating the rise of fascism in Europe by encouraging and justifying irrationalism. In section 17 of his 1961 "addenda" to *The Open Society*, entitled "Facts, Standards and Truth: A Further Criticism of Relativism," Popper refused to moderate his criticism of the Hegelian dialectic, arguing that it "played a major role in the downfall of the liberal movement in Germany... by contributing to historicism and to an identification of might and right, encouraged totalitarian modes of thought. . . . [and] undermined and eventually lowered the traditional standards of intellectual responsibility and honesty"^[75].

The philosopher of science and physicist Mario Bunge repeatedly criticized Hegelian and Marxian dialectics, calling them "fuzzy and remote from science"^[76] and a "disastrous legacy",^[77] and he concluded: "The so-called laws of dialectics, such as formulated by Engels (1940, 1954) and Lenin (1947, 1981), are false insofar as they are intelligible."^[77]

Formalism

In the past few decades, European and American logicians have attempted to provide mathematical foundations for dialectical logic or argument.^{[78]:201–372} There had been pre-formal and partially-formal treatises on argument and dialectic, from authors such as Stephen Toulmin (*The Uses of Argument*),^{[78]:203–256} Nicholas Rescher (*Dialectics*),^{[78]:330–336} and van Eemeren and Grootendorst (pragma-dialectics).^{[78]:517–614} One can include the communities of informal logic and paraconsistent logic.^{[78]:373–424} However, building on theories of defeasible reasoning (see John L. Pollock), systems have been built that define well-formedness of arguments, rules governing the process of introducing arguments based on fixed assumptions, and rules for shifting burden. Many of these logics appear in the special area of artificial intelligence and law, though the computer scientists' interest in formalizing dialectic originates in a desire to build decision support and computer-supported collaborative work systems.^[79]

See also

Philosophy

- Chinese philosophy
- Dialectic process vs. dialogic process
- Dialectical behavioral therapy
- Dialectical research
- Dialogic
- Doublethink
- False dilemma
- Gotthard Günther
- Paradox
- Recursion

- Reflective equilibrium
- Relational dialectics
- Strange loop
- Synechism
- Taoism
- Thesis, antithesis, synthesis
- Unity of opposites
- Universal dialectic

Interdisciplinary concepts

- Didactic method
- List of cycles
- Möbius strip

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- David Walls, Dialectical Social Science
 - Dialectics for Kids
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